

Why Moors help Franco



Spanish Moroccan troops in 1936

A short article by George Padmore discussing the use of Moroccan troops by Francoist forces in the Spanish Civil War, after the Popular Front government had decided to maintain colonial rule.

Submitted by Mike Harman on
February 14, 2017



Much has been written about the Moors in various sections of the Left-Wing Press in this and other countries. They have been

called the “scum of the earth,” “black riff-raff,” “mercenaries,” and other such names.

It seems rather strange that the people who use these epithets conveniently forget that these unfortunate Africans are as much the victims of a social system as Europeans, who are forced by sheer economic necessity into the armed forces of the Capitalist States and used by the imperialists to shoot down unarmed and defenceless natives in the colonies in the name of “democracy” and “law and order.”

It is not the politically backward Moors who should be blamed for being used by the forces of reaction against the Spanish workers and peasants, but the leaders of the Popular Front, who, in attempting to continue the policy of Spanish Imperialism, made it possible for Franco to exploit the natives in the service of Fascism.

The British workers have much to learn from this tragic affair, which every revolutionary Socialist, regardless of race or nationality, must deplore.

No people have had to pay such a price for Empire as the Spanish workers. It should be a warning to the French and British workers whose ruling classes control the largest Empires.

Following the American war of 1898, Spain turned to Africa in the hope of recouping there the loss of her West Indian and Pacific colonies. But it was too late. Most of the Continent was already shared out. However, in 1912, France granted her a small strip of North-Eastern Morocco as a bribe for her support against Germany.

But it was not until after the World War that an attempt was made to establish control of the hinterland. In 1921, Abdel Krim organised a revolt of the Riffs against this penetration. The Spanish garrison at Anual was completely wiped out. The Riffs swept everything before them. The prestige of Spain suffered a terrible blow.

The Military High Command called for revenge. As a preliminary step, the military caste suppressed the Spanish

constitution and set up a dictatorship under Primo de Rivera in 1923. Thus, in order to enslave the Moors, the yoke was first tightened around the necks of the Spaniards: which confirms what Lenin says, "No people oppressing other peoples can be free."

In the following year Spain and France combined against the Moors. Abdel Krim surrendered in 1926 and was banished to Madagascar. In those days the Communist International, especially its French section, was in the vanguard of the struggle on behalf of the Riffs. Today not a voice is raised on behalf of Abdel Krim. But the Moors have not forgotten their valiant leader rotting on an island in the Indian Ocean.

Had the Popular Front Government, immediately it assumed office, issued decrees granting the colonial peoples economic and political reforms as a gesture towards self-government and appealed for their support against France, it would have been assured.

For the Moors have no particular ideological interest in Fascism. They, like most colonial peoples, are not concerned with the conflicting political conflicts going on in Europe. To them all whites are alike – a feeling which can hardly be otherwise when Labour and Popular Front Governments oppress and exploit them in the same way as Tory and other reactionary Capitalists. It is only the more politically advanced colonial workers who are able to make a distinction between the white oppressors and the white oppressed.

Not until the European workers' movements, especially in countries with great empires like Britain and France show more solidarity in deeds and not words will this distrust and suspicion be removed.

Economic misery and starvation also made it possible for the Fascists to recruit natives. All of the most fertile regions of Morocco have been confiscated and given to Spanish colonists. The majority of the tribesmen eke out an existence tilling small lots of land in the most primitive fashion. Others are engaged in pastoral occupations. But they have no means of disposing of their livestock. Since Spain is the only market, preference is

given to the Spanish settlers whenever there is a demand for cattle and eggs – the only two commodities exported. The result is that thousands of natives have drifted from their villages into the coastal settlements and towns, where they beg in the bazaars.

The industrial workers are engaged in the iron ore mines at Melilla, but their condition is hardly any better than the peasants. The average wage is about 6d. per day at the present rate of exchange!

With no industries to tax and a large army and bureaucracy to maintain, the Spanish authorities in Morocco endeavour to augment the annual subsidy provided by the home Government by saddling the natives with heavy taxes. Those unable to pay have their lands and cattle confiscated.

Commenting upon the economic situation, Senor Vicens, advisor to the Popular Front Government, in an interview with “Opportunity” (March, 1938), said that “Crops were very bad last year and the misery of the people has been terrible ever since. To many of them the war was a godsend: it meant an offer of work with a promise of pay.

“The first Moors brought into Spain for this war were already in the colonial military formations. They were regular soldiers, ordered by their commanding officers to serve in Spain. The chiefs and officers being Fascists, they were ordered out on the Fascist side.

“Though many of them had no particular desire to come to Spain at that time, they had no choice in the matter – any more than any other colonial troops have any choice as to when and where they are to fight.”

Asked to explain why the Popular Front Government failed to make some gesture of independence to the Moors, Senor Vicens replied:



“The Republicans would have granted autonomy to Morocco readily, long ago, except that France would not permit it.

France was fearful of the effect on her adjoining African colonies. As soon as Morocco had become an independent State the French colonies would have demanded their liberation and independence. France was not ready to grant them this, and we were bound to France by a spirit of co-operation.”

It is the Spanish workers and peasants, on the one hand, and the Moors, on the other, who are paying with their lives for this treachery.

This is the price of Popular Front Government in Spain and in France! **British workers beware!**

Source: New Leader, 20 May 1938.

Transcribed: by Christian Hogsbjerg for the Marxists Internet Archive.

Originally posted at

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/padmore/1938/moors-franco.htm>

Attachments

[Why Moors help Franco.pdf](#) (182.25 KB)

**racism, imperialism, Spain, Spanish civil war,
Morocco, colonialism, George Padmore, PDF**

Comments

Steven. 8 years 6 months ago

Great text. If the Republic had decided to stop exploiting Moroccan workers, then perhaps the whole course of the war could have been changed...

Mark. 8 years 6 months ago

This is interesting as well:

Elisabeth Bolorinos Allard - The Crescent and the Dagger: Representations of the Moorish Other during the Spanish Civil War

Mark. 8 years 6 months ago

El Laberinto Marroquí - full length documentary on the Rif War and the Moroccans who fought for Franco in the Civil War (in Spanish):

<https://vimeo.com/91783750>

There's a short clip from it here with English subtitles:

El Laberinto Marroqui

David Rousset's account of acting as an intermediary in negotiations between Moroccan nationalists and the Republic:

Steven. 8 years 6 months ago

Mark.

This is interesting as well:

*Elisabeth Bolorinos Allard - The Crescent and the
Dagger: Representations of the Moorish Other during
the Spanish Civil War*

yeah that looks really interesting.

On a related note, a few years ago I was looking through some old Spanish Socialist propaganda from during the Civil War, which included clearly faked photos of Moroccan troops having sex with sheep and things like that.

On a more recent note, the final scene of the film *Libertarias* - otherwise a great film - unfortunately includes a horrible rape scene, but which inaccurately shows Moroccan troops raping a Spanish anarchist woman but then being punished by a "decent" Nationalist Spanish army officer. Whereas in fact the "decent" white Spanish Nationalists were in charge of the campaign of raping Republican women.

Asked to explain why the Popular Front Government failed to make some gesture of independence to the Moors, Senor Vicens replied:

I remember reading that after the Popular Front failed to given even symbolic gestures of independence to Morocco Moorish nationalists established contact with members of the POUM and CNT etc to acquire arms to stage an insurrection. They didn't have enough guns to spare but I think there was an attempt to buy weapons in France to support an uprising but this also failed.

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